

# There's lots of potential in the newest Timex

One of the pitfalls of buying computers new on the market is having to take some things on faith. Manufacturers are notorious for announcing forthcoming software and features for new machines, but often failing to follow up. Consumers often expect too much of the hardware available at the moment.

So it is with the new Timex Sinclair 2068 Color Computer. It has considerable potential, but we may have to wait a few months to see how the promises pan out.

The machine presently offers a good deal for the \$199 list price (discounted to \$169 at Polk Bros. stores). Made of high-impact plastic, it features a healthy 72K (73,728 characters) of memory, divided into 24K of read-only memory that contains the operating system and BASIC language, and 48K of random access, or working, memory. That compares well with the basic 16K of RAM featured by the Radio Shack Color Computer 2 and Atari 600XL, both \$159 machines.

The 2068 is also remarkably easy to set up, thanks in part to an exceptionally lucid instruction manual. I had it hooked to our color TV and running in less than 10 minutes. In addition, the Timex has joystick ports, high-resolution color graphics, a 32-character-by-24-line display (similar to that on the Color Computer 2) that can be boosted to 64 characters, and a built-in speaker with range of 10 octaves and 130 semitones. You can compose music as well as sound effects for games on this machine.

Unlike the original Timex 1000, which had a primitive membrane keyboard with places to push, the 2068 offers 42 movable keys plus a space bar. In customary Timex fashion, each key not only types a letter but can write as many as six BASIC commands. This might look confusing at first, but programmers will find it a convenience.

Touch typists, however, won't like the "Chiclet" calculator-style keys, which don't match the typewriter-style keyboards on the Radio Shack and Atari. Hunt-and-peckers might not care; few kids are touch typists anyway.

More important for them is the quality of the software. The game and educational programs I tested are inexpensive, well-designed and extremely easy to use. Tape cassettes cost \$10 to \$20 and the more convenient cartridges \$13 to \$30. The young Apple fans in my household approved of the games (Crazybugs and Androids, both on cassette) and the educational programs (States & Capitals on cartridge), pronouncing their screen color and resolution excellent. The machine also comes with a first-rate learning cassette.

The home accounting and budgeting programs, on the other hand, seemed primitive. Disk drives with plenty of memory storage are needed for this kind of thing. The home-improvement program was pretty

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to watch but a little silly: It calculates dimensions of rooms and costs of painting, wallpapering and carpeting, a job more realistically done with pencil and calculator.

All in all, the Timex Sinclair 2068 presently is an excellent buy in a game and educational machine for the home. What about the future?

Timex says a built-in "bank-switching" capability will allow the computer to use one or more 64K programs at the same time. The software for this is not yet available.

Nor is a word-processing program—the most important practical attribute of a home computer—though it is promised "soon." At present the 2068 can use only the

printer Timex sells; it uses narrow thermal paper, hardly suitable for school reports or letters. A Centronics interface is also promised "soon" to allow the 2068 to operate with full-size printers. A modem for telecommunications and terminal software are also promised.

Promises, promises. . . Those and \$169 will get you a first-class computer for kids right now. But whether the 2068 will be a good general computer for Mom and Dad as well depends on the word processor and printer interface, and we'll just have to wait and see.

No reason we can't be optimistic. Timex is a sound, well-known company, and its original computer, the famous \$99 Timex Sinclair 1000 (now discounted to as little as \$39) spawned a great deal of software and hardware support by third-party vendors. With luck we won't have to wait long for the 2068 to do the same.